

Message Text

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51

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MC-02 EB-07 OMB-01 ACDA-10 PM-03

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02

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R 281404Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3528

SECDEF WASHDC

SEC AIR FORCE WASHDC

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 02794

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MASS, BE

SUBJECT: PRESS ARTICLE ON F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF: BRUSSELS 2728

1. KNACK MAGAZINE STORY CHARGING THAT DEFMIN VANDEN BOEYNANTS' OFFICE TAMPERED WITH DATA SO AS TO FAVOR FRENCH MIRAGE F1M53 OVER F-16 AND HIS NEWS CONFERENCE RECEIVED WIDE COVERAGE AND COMMENTARY IN ALL MEDIA. PRESS GENERALLY MODERATE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD DEFMIN. FRANCOPHONE PAPERS UNCRITICAL OR SUPPORTIVE OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS FOR MOST PART. MOST CRITICAL WERE DUTCH LANGUAGE DAILIES REGIONAL HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG AND MASS CIRCULATION HET LAATSTE NIEUWS.

2. NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND RADIO/TV REPORTS ON THE NEWS CONFERENCE STRESSED VANDEN BOEYNANTS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THE F-16 IS LESS EXPENSIVE THAN THE MIRAGE BUT THAT THE MIRAGE IS FASTER. ALSO REPORTED WAS HIS STATEMENT THAT THE 7 PER CENT PRICE DIFFERENTIAL DOES

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NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT POSSIBLE DOLLAR FLUCTURATION.

3. AVIATION WRITER OF HET LAATSTE NIEUWS REPORTS THAT "DENMARK AND NORWAY FAVOR THE U.S. PLANE" AND "IT IS ALSO KNOWN THAT DUTCH EXPERTS FAVOR THIS VIEWPOINT. IF OUR GOVERNMENT CAREFULLY READS THE REPORT-- AND READS BETWEEN THE LINES -- IT MUST ARRIVE AT THE SAME CONCLUSION." IN ANOTHER ARTICLE, SAME WRITER CONCLUDES THAT "THE ONLY THING THAT CAN MAKE THE AMERICAN PLANE MORE EXPENSIVE IS A BELGIAN DECISION TO BUY FEWER THAN THE 116 PLANES PROPOSED BY NATO." EDITORIALS IN THE NEWSPAPER STRESSED THAT NATO STANDARDIZATION IS POSSIBLE ONLY IF THE " PARTNERS MAKE THEIR PURCHASES TOGETHER. IF WE MAKE ANOTHER CHOICE IT PROVES THAT MILITARY NEEDS ARE ONLY SECONDARY."

4. HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG SAID THAT "ACCORDING TO MILITARY EXPERTS THE AMERICAN COMBAT FIGHTER CLEARLY IS BETTER THAN ITS FRENCH COUNTERPART. DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAS OPENLY ADMITTED THAT THE F-16 IS 7 PER CENT CHEAPER THAN THE MIRAGE..

..
IN ADDITION, ONE MUST NOT FORGET THAT THE FRENCH AIR FORCE ORIGINALLY DID NOT WANT THE MIRAGE."

5. THE CONSERVATIVE LA LIBRE BELGIQUE DEFENDED VANDEN BOEYNANTS SAYING: "THE ASSERTIONS CONTAINED IN THE KNACK ARTICLE ARE ERRONEOUS OR RESULT FROM FAULTY INTERPRETATION OF DOCUMENTS."

6. FINANCIAL L'ECHO DE LA BOURSE IN AN EDITORIAL SUPPORTING THE DEFENSE MINISTER SAID "MR. VANDEN BOEYNANTS KNOWS HIS FILE WELL AND DEFENDS IT MARVELOUSLY...(HE) IS CERTAINLY NOT WRONG WHEN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT A POSSIBLE REVALUATION OF THE AMERICAN CURRENCY. HE OBVIOUSLY DOES NOT WANT TO RUN THE RISK THAT IN

YEARS TO COME HE MIGHT BE BLAMED FOR MAKING A DEAL THAT TURNED OUT MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE THAN ORIGINALLY EXPECTED."
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